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## **ECTS AND THE TEACHING ORGANIZATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: STUDENTS' VIEWS**

### ***Abstract:***

*By accepting the Bologna process in 2003, the higher education in the Republic of Macedonia started a wide process of reforms for the purpose of improving its compatibility and connection to European higher education institutions. One of the changes is the implementation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which should provide, among other things, the students to be active in the teaching and be involved participants in the learning process. This paper explores the opinions and views of the students at the Faculty of Pedagogy “St. Kliment Ohridski” in Skopje, the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip, and the Institute of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, about the teaching organization in accordance with the ECTS of these faculties. This article is part of a wider research of the teaching organization at the faculties of education in Macedonia, conducted in 2010, which encompasses 240 students polled from the three faculties as well as around ten employed staff that have data regarding the conditions for work at the faculties. The attention of the paper is firstly directed to attendance of lectures and tutorials, as well as the time scale and methods of education. The following part focuses on the participation of the students during lectures and tutorials as well as their readiness for the lessons. In the end, it examines the cooperation among the students, and among the students and professors, as well as the opinions of students regarding the changes that should be introduced in the lectures and tutorials.*

**Key words:** HIGHER EDUCATION, EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER AND ACCUMULATION SYSTEM (ECTS), TEACHING ORGANIZATION, HIGHER EDUCATION DIDACTICS.

### ***Introduction***

The Bologna Process represents a process of reforming the higher education in Europe, which has come as a result of the need for strengthening its competitive nature and attractiveness, and for instigating the mobility of students and their employment. One of the main tools of this process for connecting the national educational systems and building a European space for higher education is the establishment of a system of credits, which is called *the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System - ECTS* (Bolonjska deklaracija, 1999; Council of Europe). The ECTS is accepted at a national level by many of the European countries.<sup>1</sup> It attempts to move the focus in the University education from the academic staff to the student, from teaching to the research component of learning:

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<sup>1</sup>More information on the level of implementation of the ECTS can be found in European Commission (2010).

*"The ECTS is a system that is student-oriented because it helps the institutions to make a change in the design and transfer of the program from the traditional teacher -centered approach to approaches that are adapted to the needs and expectations of the students."* (European Communities, 2009: 13).

The new way of teaching organization does not decrease the role of the teacher. In fact, it carries with itself a change of the role of both the student and the teacher. The teaching directed towards the student encourages them to ask questions, and to do research, thus from a passive student in the teaching, a user of a given service, they become an active participant in the learning, who carries responsibility for the results that are achieved. The teacher, on the other hand, from a main source of knowledge, becomes a mediator and leader in the teaching, who is among the students and not in front of them in a dominant and superior role. As a result of these relations, the character of the educational process changes as well: it is not a belonging to the teacher alone, but of mutual ownership between the teacher and the students (Attard et al., 2010; Миовска-Спасева, Ачковска-Лешковска, 2010; Sursock & Smidt, 2010; Usaci et al.).

According to Bloom, the paradigm change "from teaching to learning" has been defined in the following way (Dorfer & Ressler, 2009: 2):

Table 1: *Comparison between the learning teacher-dominated process and the student – dominated process*

| The teacher in the center                         | The student in the center                            |
|---|--|
| Transfer of information by the teacher            | Active acquisition of knowledge by the students      |
| The style of learning is general                  | Different individual styles of learning              |
| The teacher describes the correct answer          | The students give the answers                        |
| The teacher leads the learning process            | The teacher supports the learning process            |
| Static and constant                               | Dynamic and different                                |
| The teacher and the student are opposing sides    | The teacher and student cooperate                    |
| The student studies before the exam itself        | The student learns during the course of the lectures |
| The student does not have to be regularly present | The student's presence has significance              |
| Lectures  | Discussions  |
| Test evaluation                                   | Course evaluation                                    |

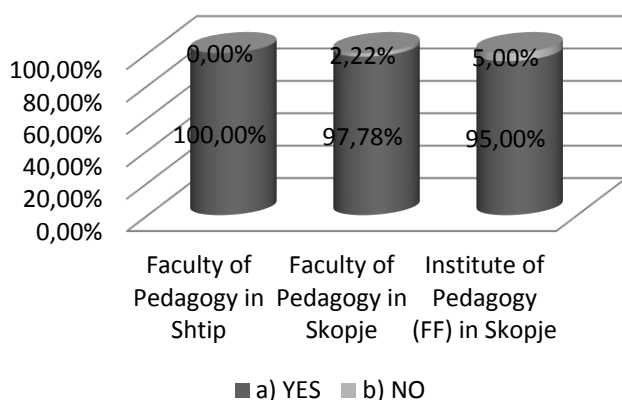
Source: Dorfer & Ressler (2009)

The Republic of Macedonia accepted the Bologna process in 2003 and from that year onwards the higher education started to reform in order to connect to the European institutions of higher education (Хаџишче & al, 2006).

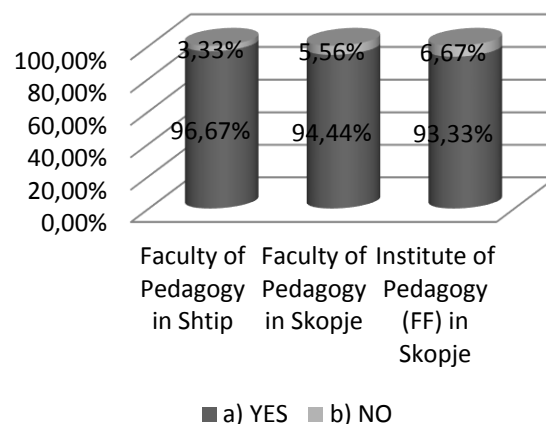
In order to examine the views and opinions of the students from the faculties of teaching in this country about the teaching organization according to the ECTS of their faculties, in the second half of the academic year 2009/10, we conducted a research. It covered 240 students from the Faculty of Pedagogy “St. Kliment Ohridski” in Skopje, the Institute of Pedagogy at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, and the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip, as well as 10 employed staff from the three faculties of teaching. For the students a questionnaire was designed, while for the employed staff from the faculties a survey was designed. In this article a part of the results are presented, especially regarding the organization of the lectures and tutorials at the three faculties of teaching.

### *Attendance of lectures and tutorials*

Considering that the new way of organizing the studies puts the student in the center of the teaching, in this part of the research we wanted to discover what the role of the student is during the lectures and tutorials, and how much they are engaged during those classes. Regarding the attendance of lectures and tutorials by students, we came to the following data:



Graph 1: *Attendance of lectures*



Graph 2: *Attendance of tutorials*

Almost all of the surveyed students of the faculties of teaching answered that they attend the lectures and tutorials. When regarding how often they attend both lectures and tutorials, we noticed that a larger part of the surveyed students of the three faculties of teaching regularly attend lectures and tutorials. This can be noticed in the following data:

- At the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip 98.89% of the surveyed students regularly attend lectures, while 1.11% sometimes. Concerning the attendance of tutorials, 93.10% regularly attend tutorials, while 6.9% sometimes.
- At the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje 94.32% of the surveyed students regularly attend lectures, while 3.41% sometimes, and 2.27% rarely. Concerning the attendance of tutorials, 85.88% regularly attend tutorials, while 12.94% sometimes, and 1.18% rarely.
- At the Institute of Pedagogy 96.49% of the surveyed students regularly attend lectures, while 3.15% sometimes. Concerning the attendance of tutorials, 87.5% regularly attend tutorials, while 10.71% sometimes, and 1.79% rarely.

Regarding the interest that the students show for attending the lectures and tutorials, we came to the following results:

Table 2: *Students' interests for attending lectures*

|  | Faculty of Pedagogy<br>in Shtip |        | Faculty of Pedagogy<br>in Skopje |        | Institute of Pedagogy<br>(FF) in Skopje |        |
|--|---------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|--------|---|--------|
|  | F                               | %      | f                                | %      | f                                       | %      |
| a) Huge, because the lectures are useful                 | 60                              | 66,67% | 57                               | 64,77% | 40                                      | 70,18% |
| b) I attend classes only because attendance is important | 30                              | 33,33% | 31                               | 35,23% | 17                                      | 29,82% |
| c) Other   | 0                               | 0,00%  | 0                                | 0,00%  | 0                                       | 0,00%  |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>90</b>                       |        | <b>88</b>                        |        | <b>57</b>                               |        |

Table 3: *Students' interests for attending tutorials*

|  | Faculty of Pedagogy<br>in Shtip |        | Faculty of Pedagogy<br>in Skopje |        | Institute of Pedagogy<br>(FF) in Skopje |        |
|--|---------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------|--------|---|--------|
|  | F                               | %      | f                                | %      | F                                       | %      |
| a) I attend the tutorials to learn more                  | 60                              | 68,97% | 64                               | 75,29% | 43                                      | 76,79% |
| b) I attend classes only because attendance is important | 26                              | 29,89% | 21                               | 24,71% | 13                                      | 23,21% |
| c) Other   | 1                               | 1,15%  | 0                                | 0,00%  | 0                                       | 0,00%  |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>87</b>                       |        | <b>85</b>                        |        | <b>56</b>                               |        |

With the larger part of the students, the interest for attending lectures and tutorials is significant, and the reason they attend them is that they regard them to be useful and would like to increase their knowledge. A lower percentage, but not an insignificant one, is the percentage of students that attend lectures and tutorials only because attendance is noted, meaning that they will gain points only by their presence.

### *The time frame and methodical form of the teaching*

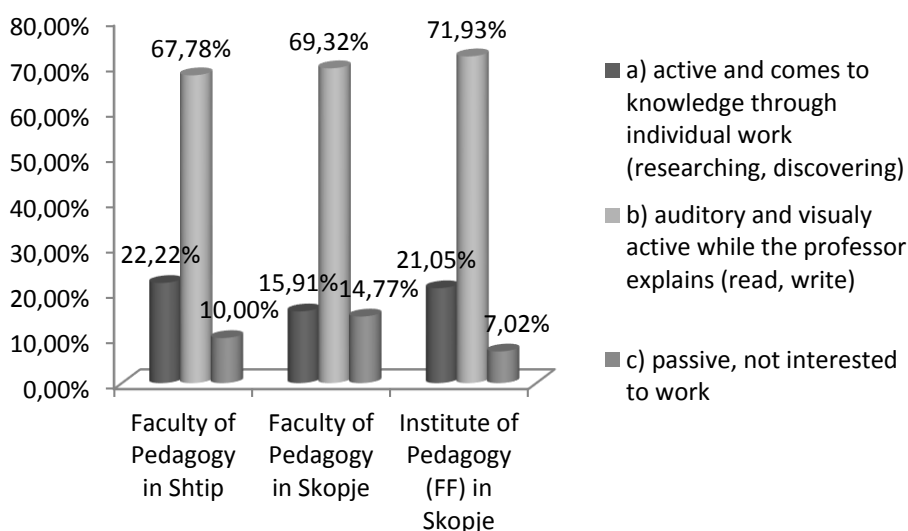
The time organization of the lectures and tutorials is of great importance because the effectiveness of the students and the degree of students' inclusion in the work depend on it. The extended lectures and tutorials cause loss of attention, concentration and passivization of the students. In terms of how lectures and tutorials are organized with time, a larger part of the surveyed students of the three faculties of teaching responded that lectures and tutorials are mainly organized with breaks that are agreed on between the teacher and the students.

Concerning the methodical form of the teaching, we came to the following replies by the students. During the lectures, frontal work is dominant, and sometimes teachers use group work, pair work, and individual work. When the methods used during lectures are regarded, we noticed that the most applied are the method of oral presentation and the method of conversation, and at the Institute of Pedagogy the method of conversation is used more often. The other methods are used sometimes, while for the method of practical and laboratory work more than 70% of the surveyed students at the faculties of teaching replied that it is not applied.

At the pedagogical faculties during the tutorials, frontal work is used more frequently, while the rest are used only sometimes. At the Institute of Pedagogy the group form of work is used during tutorials more than the frontal form, while the other forms, among which pair work appears often, are applied only sometimes. The method of oral presentation and the method of conversation are dominant methods during tutorials at all three faculties of teaching, while the other methods are used only sometimes, and the method of practical and laboratory work is used the least often.

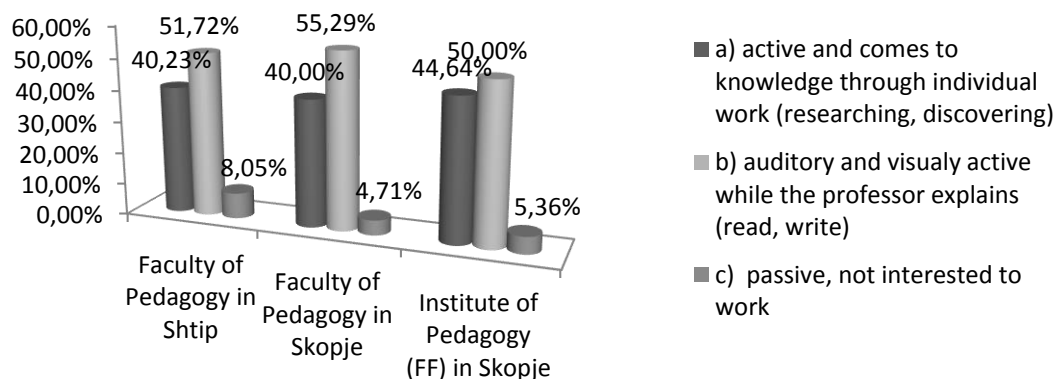
### ***Student activity during lectures and tutorials and student preparation for classes***

Contemporary teaching means that the student has an active role during the lectures and tutorials, i.e. that students do research and discover on their own, while the teacher will guide their work. The question that referred to student activity during lectures and tutorials received the following answers:



Graph 3: *Student activity during lectures*

At the three faculties of teaching, the largest part of the students answered that during lectures they were both auditory and visually active, and that activity mainly referred to reading and note-taking while the professor was explaining. A smaller percentage of students gained knowledge during lectures through individual work (researching, discovering). The smallest number of students were both sensory and thought inactive and uninterested for work during the lectures. Student activity during tutorials can be represented through the following graph:



Graph 4: *Student activity during tutorials*

Around half of the surveyed students at the three faculties of teaching during tutorials are both auditory and visually active, i.e. while the professor is explaining they are reading and taking notes. During tutorials there is a larger percentage of students who gain knowledge through individual work, researching, and discovering, rather than during the lectures. A smaller number of students are both sensory and thought inactive and uninterested for work during the tutorials.

In order for the students to be active participants in the lectures and tutorials it is necessary that they prepare for classes. We came to the following answers regarding the preparation of the students for lectures and tutorials:

Table 4: *Students' preparation for lectures*

|        | Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip |        | Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje |        | Institute of Pedagogy (FF) in Skopje |        |
|--------|------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|--------|
|        | F                            | %      | f                             | %      | f                                    | %      |
| a) YES | 37                           | 41,11% | 46                            | 52,27% | 16                                   | 28,07% |
| b) NO  | 53                           | 58,89% | 42                            | 47,73% | 41                                   | 71,93% |
| Total  | 90                           |        | 88                            |        | 57                                   |        |

The percentage of students who are not prepared for lectures is big. Out of the three faculties of teaching, the Institute of Pedagogy has the largest percentage of students who are not prepared for lectures.

Out of the total percentage of students who prepare for lectures, we noticed that their preparation is based on using the following literature:

- At the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip 83.78% use the book that the professor teaches from, while 8.11% use additional literature from the Internet, and 8.11% use additional literature from the library.
- At the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje 65.22% use the book that the professor teaches from, while 26.09% use additional literature from the Internet, and 8.7% use additional literature from the library.
- At the Institute of Pedagogy 66.67% use the book that the professor teaches from, while 26.67% use additional literature from the Internet, and 6.67% use additional literature from the library.

Therefore we can conclude that the largest percentage of the students of the three faculties of teaching use the book that the professor teaches from as literature for preparing for the lectures. The Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje and the Institute of Pedagogy have a larger percentage of students who use additional literature from the Internet, as opposed to the percentage of students from the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip. The percentage of students from the three faculties of teaching who as preparation for lectures use additional literature from the library, is small. A large number of students also come to tutorials unprepared. The data is shown in the following table:

Table 5: *Students' preparation for tutorials*

|              | Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip |        | Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje |        | Institute of Pedagogy (FF) in Skopje |        |
|--------------|------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|--------|
|              | f                            | %      | F                             | %      | f                                    | %      |
| a) YES       | 37                           | 42,53% | 51                            | 60,00% | 19                                   | 33,93% |
| b) NO        | 50                           | 57,47% | 34                            | 40,00% | 37                                   | 66,07% |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>87</b>                    |        | <b>85</b>                     |        | <b>56</b>                            |        |

The results show that the number of students, especially at the Institute of Pedagogy, who do not prepare for tutorials is big. Out of the total percentage of students who prepare for tutorials, we noticed that their preparation is based on the following literature:

- At the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip 89.19% use the book that the professor teaches from, while 8.11% use additional literature from the internet, and 2.7% use additional literature from the library.
- At the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje 68.63% use the book that the professor teaches from, while 13.73% use additional literature from the internet, and 17.65% use additional literature from the library.
- At the Institute of Pedagogy 57.89% use the book that the professor teaches from, while 42.11% use additional literature from the internet.

The Institute of Pedagogy has a much larger percentage of students who use additional literature from the internet as preparation for tutorials. On the other hand, the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje has a

larger number of students who when preparing for tutorials use additional literature from the library. The results show that the number of pages that students read as preparation for lectures and tutorials is not insignificant, but it is necessary for their preparation for both lectures and tutorials to use not only the book that the professor teaches from but also other additional literature from the internet and the library. This way the students would expand and deepen their knowledge.

### **Level of cooperation between the students and professors**

Contemporary teaching requires providing conditions for the students to mutually cooperate during the lectures and tutorials. Research on the cooperation among the students from the three faculties of teaching demonstrated the following results: out of the surveyed students from the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip 38.89% answered that the lectures are organized mainly for them to cooperate with colleagues, while 46.67% answered that rarely do professors organize the lectures so that they can cooperate with their colleagues, and 14.44% answered that there is no possibility for them to cooperate with their colleagues. At the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje 40.91% said that the lectures allow for constant cooperation with their colleagues, while 48.86% said that professors rarely organize the lectures so as to create cooperation with colleagues, and 10.23% said that there is no possibility to cooperate with colleagues. At the Institute of Pedagogy 56.36% said that the lectures are organized mainly so that they can cooperate with colleagues, while 36.36% said that professors rarely organize the lectures so as to create cooperation with colleagues, and 7.27% said that there is no possibility to cooperate with colleagues.

Students of the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip and Skopje have divided opinions about the opportunities to cooperate with their colleagues during tutorials. The percentage of students who answered that the tutorials are mainly organized so that they constantly cooperate with their colleagues is very close to the percentage of students who answered that they rarely have the opportunity for cooperation. The Institute of Pedagogy has a much larger percentage of students (80.36% of the surveyed) who consider the tutorials to be organized in a way that allows constant cooperation with colleagues.

Regarding the question as to the level of cooperation of the students with their professors and teaching assistants, the following answers were received:

Table 6: *The level of cooperation with the professors and teaching assistants*

|                                       | Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip |        | Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje |        | Institute of Pedagogy (FF) in Skopje |        |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|--------|
|                                       | f                            | %      | F                             | %      | f                                    | %      |
| <b>a) Low level of cooperation</b>    | 13                           | 14,44% | 17                            | 19,32% | 6                                    | 10,53% |
| <b>b) Medium level of cooperation</b> | 57                           | 63,33% | 59                            | 67,05% | 38                                   | 66,67% |
| <b>c) High level of cooperation</b>   | 20                           | 22,22% | 12                            | 13,64% | 13                                   | 22,81% |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                          | <b>90</b>                    |        | <b>88</b>                     |        | <b>57</b>                            |        |



The percentage of students of the three faculties of teaching who consider their cooperation with their professors and teaching assistants to be at a middle level is approximately equal (63.33%, 67.05%, and 66.6%). Taking into consideration these results, it is necessary to improve the level of cooperation because the quality and success of the work depends on it.

The question of how much the students contact the professors outside of their lectures and tutorials, and why they take opportunity of those meetings, is also of great significance. It is the students of the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje who most often visit their professors during office hours (the largest part of the surveyed students answered that they visit their professors during office hours twice a week), followed by the students of the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip (once a week), and at the other end the students of the Institute of Pedagogy (once a month). During the office hours, students base their questions only on the material or the exams, while there are no conversations about personal problems at all, which means that the professor-student relationship is strictly professional

Regarding the question of whether the students have enough tutorials, we came to the following answers:

Table 7: *Students' thoughts regarding the number of tutorials*

|   | Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip |        | Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje |        | Institute of Pedagogy (FF) in Skopje |        |
|---|------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|--------|
|   | f                            | %      | F                             | %      | f                                    | %      |
| a) Yes, it is enough for me                               | 70                           | 80,46% | 50                            | 58,82% | 35                                   | 62,50% |
| b) It is enough for me, but I sometimes need more classes | 15                           | 17,24% | 32                            | 37,65% | 18                                   | 32,14% |
| c) It is not enough for me                                | 2                            | 2,30%  | 3                             | 3,53%  | 3                                    | 5,36%  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>87</b>                    |        | <b>85</b>                     |        | <b>56</b>                            |        |

Therefore, the students are mainly satisfied by the number of tutorials, and some (37.65% from the Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje, 32.14% from the Institute of Pedagogy, and 17.24% from the Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip) sometimes have the need for more classes. There is a small number of students of the three faculties of teaching who say that the number of tutorials they have is not enough.

Regarding whether the students have any comments about the lectures, and whether they would change anything, we came to the following results:

Table 8: *The need for introducing changes in the lectures*

|        | Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip |        | Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje |        | Institute of Pedagogy (FF) in Skopje |        |
|--------|------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|--------|
|        | f                            | %      | f                             | %      | f                                    | %      |
| a) YES | 43                           | 47,78% | 66                            | 75,00% | 33                                   | 57,89% |

|              |           |        |           |        |           |        |
|--------------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|-----------|--------|
| <b>b) NO</b> | 47        | 52,22% | 22        | 25,00% | 24        | 42,11% |
| <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>90</b> |        | <b>88</b> |        | <b>57</b> |        |

There is a high percentage of students who would want to introduce changes in the lectures, such as: more activity on the part of all the students, and not just some; more cooperation and interaction; changes in the professor-student relationship; more interesting lectures; using more modern methods; more accessible professors; less application of the frontal form in teaching; and higher instigation of the students for activity and discussion.

The number of students who want to introduce changes in the tutorials is shown in the following chart:

Table 9: *The need for introducing changes in the tutorials*

|               | Faculty of Pedagogy in Shtip |        | Faculty of Pedagogy in Skopje |        | Institute of Pedagogy (FF) in Skopje |        |
|---------------|------------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------------|--------|
|               | f                            | %      | f                             | %      | f                                    | %      |
| <b>a) YES</b> | 21                           | 24,14% | 35                            | 41,18% | 19                                   | 33,93% |
| <b>b) NO</b>  | 66                           | 75,86% | 50                            | 58,82% | 37                                   | 66,07% |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>87</b>                    |        | <b>85</b>                     |        | <b>56</b>                            |        |

Changes that students want to introduce in the tutorials are: application of modern methods; more practical work; a different organization of tutorials and lectures; removing monotony; increasing the level of cooperation among the professors, etc. The received results show that the percentage of students who want to introduce changes in the lectures is higher than in the tutorials.

### ***Conclusion***

On the basis of the received data, we can come to the following conclusions:

1. Almost all of the surveyed students of the three faculties of teaching attend the lectures and tutorials, but it is a worrying fact that a large number of the students do that only because attendance is recorded. In order for this situation to change, it is necessary to stimulate the interest of the students to attend classes through organizing attractive and efficient lessons that will allow students to understand the need and use of attendance.
2. The time organization of the teaching is well done, and concerning the methodic form, the types most often used are the frontal form or work and the methods of oral presentation and conversation. In order to realize teaching that will be student-focused, it is necessary to implement different contemporary methods and forms whose application will change the traditional role of the student in the teaching process.
3. The students are more active during tutorials rather than lectures, but it is noteworthy that a large percentage of the students do not prepare for lectures nor for tutorials, and are thus only passive listeners of the classes. However those who do it mainly read from the book that the

professor teaches from, and then study the same book for the exam. It would be a good idea for each professor to allow the students at the beginning of the semester to have a clear overview of the time division of the topics that will be covered. At the same time, the teachers should stimulate the individual research work of the students through using additional literature from the internet or from the library, which will expand their knowledge of the given issue.

4. There is a middle level of cooperation with the professors and teaching assistants, and a different level of cooperation between the students during the lectures and tutorials. In order for the cooperation to intensify it is necessary that the professors stimulate the interaction between the students during their work, and they be an example of accessibility, openness and cooperation

Contemporary teaching requires such organization that is student-centered and creates conditions for their active participation, and individual and cooperative research. Regarding the fact that it prepares students for life in conditions of constant changes and unknown future, it is necessary that the teachers allow the students to face the challenges, difficulties and problematic situations, which will be contemplated, discussed and mutually solved. This is how the attractiveness and efficiency of the teaching will be revived, and through it the quality of the higher education in general.

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## **ЕКТС И ОРГАНИЗАЦИЈАТА НА НАСТАВАТА ВО ВИСОКОТО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ ВО РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА: МИСЛЕЊА НА СТУДЕНТИТЕ**

### ***Апстракт:***

*Со прифаќањето на Болоњскиот процес во 2003 година, во високото образование во Република Македонија започнува широк процес на реформи кои се во функција на негова компатибилност и поврзување со европските високообразовни институции. Една од измените е имплементацијата на Европскиот систем за трансфер и акумулација на кредити (ЕКТС), која треба да обезбеди, меѓу другото, студентите да бидат активни во наставата и ангажирани учесници во процесот на учењето. Трудот ги истражува мислењата и ставовите на студентите од Педагошкиот факултет „Св. Климент Охридски“ во Скопје, Педагошкиот факултет во Штип и Институтот за Педагогија при Филозофскиот факултет во Скопје, за организацијата на наставата според ЕКТС на нивните факултети. Тој е дел од пошироко истражување на организацијата на наставата на наставничките факултети во Македонија, спроведено во 2010 година, во кое беа опфатени 240 студенти од трите факултети, како и десетина вработени кои имаат податоци за условите за работа на факултетите. Вниманието е најнапред насочено кон посетеноста на часовите на кои се одржуваат предавања и вежби, а потоа се разгледува временскиот и методскиот облик на наставата. Во наредниот дел фокусот е ставен на активноста на студентите за време на предавањата и вежбите и нивната подготвеност за часовите. На крај се разгледува нивото на соработка меѓу студентите и меѓу студентите и професорите, како и мислењата на студентите за промените што би требало да се направат во предавањата и вежбите.*

**Клучни зборови:** ВИСОКО ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ, ЕВРОПСКИ СИСТЕМ ЗА ТРАНСФЕР И АКУМУЛАЦИЈА НА КРЕДИТИ (ЕКТС), ОРГАНИЗАЦИЈА НА НАСТАВАТА, ВИСОКОШКОЛСКА ДИДАКТИКА.